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## FREEDOM

[a. *Total freedom or none at all.*]

497 To repeat, it is clear that no causal relation can be conceived between the subject and his body, his world, or his society. Calling into question what my presence to myself teaches me would result in the loss of the foundations of all of my certainties. Now, at the very moment that I turn toward myself to describe myself, I catch sight of an anonymous flow,<sup>1</sup> an overall project in which “states of consciousness” do not yet exist, nor, *a fortiori*, do characteristics of any kind. I am for myself neither “jealous,” nor “curious,” nor “hunchbacked,” nor “a civil servant.” We are often amazed that the disabled person or the person suffering from a disease can bear their situation. But in their own eyes they are not disabled or dying. Until the moment he slips into a coma, the dying person is inhabited by a consciousness; he is everything that he sees, he has this means of escape. Consciousness can never objectify itself as sick-consciousness or as disabled-consciousness; and, even if the elderly man complains of his old age or the disabled person of his disability, they can only do so when they compare themselves to others or when they see themselves through the eyes of others, that is, when they adopt a statistical or an objective view of themselves; and these complaints are never wholly made in good faith: in returning to the core of his consciousness, everyone feels him-

self to be beyond his particular characteristics and so resigns himself to them. They are the price we pay, without even thinking about it, for being in the world, a formality we take for granted. And this is how we can criticize our own face and yet not wish to exchange it for another.

It seems that no particularity can be attached to the insurmountable generality of consciousness, and that no limit can be imposed upon this vast power of evasion. For something from the outside to be able to determine me (in both senses of the word),<sup>2</sup> I would have to be a thing. My freedom and my universality cannot be eclipsed. It is inconceivable that I am free in some of my actions while determined in others, for what exactly would this idle freedom be that grants free play to determinisms? If we assume that my freedom is abolished when it does not act, then how will it be reborn? If, by some miracle, I were able to turn myself into a thing, then how would I later recreate my consciousness? If I am free, even once, then I do not figure among the totality of things, and I must be free continuously. If my actions even once cease to be my own, they will never again become my own; if I lose my hold upon the world, I will never regain it. In addition, it is inconceivable that my freedom could be limited; we cannot be partially free, and if, as it is often said, motivations incline me in a certain direction, then there are only two possibilities: either they have the force to make me act, in which case there is no freedom, or they do not have this force, in which case my freedom is total, as great in the worst tortures as in the peace of my home.

We would thus have to renounce not only the idea of causality, but even the idea of motivation.<sup>3</sup> The supposed motive does not weigh on my decision; rather, my decision lends the motivation its force. Everything that I “am” in virtue of nature or history – hunchbacked, handsome, or Jewish – I never fully am for myself, as we explained just above. And although I am surely these things in the eyes of others, I nonetheless remain free to posit the other either as a consciousness whose gaze reaches me in my very being, or rather as a mere object. Again, this alternative itself is certainly a constraint: if I am ugly, then I have the choice either to be an outcast or to condemn others – that is, I am left free between masochism and sadism – but I am not free to ignore others. But this alternative itself, which is a given of the human condition, is not an alternative for myself understood as a pure consciousness, for it is still me who makes others exist for me and who makes us exist for each other as men. Moreover, even if being human were imposed

upon me, only leaving me a choice between ways of being human, when we consider this choice in itself – and notwithstanding the small number of possible choices – this would still be a free choice. If it is said that my temperament inclines me more toward sadism or rather toward masochism, this again is just a figure of speech, for my temperament only exists  
 499 for the second-order knowledge that I obtain of myself when I see myself through another person's eyes and insofar as I recognize this, valorize it, and in this sense choose it.

What leads us astray here is that we often seek freedom in voluntary deliberation, which examines each motive one by one and appears to go along with the strongest or with the most convincing among them. In fact, the deliberation follows the decision, for my secret decision is what makes the motives appear and we could not even conceive of what the force of a motive might be without a decision that confirms it or counters it. When I have abandoned a project, suddenly the motives that I believed I had in favor of sticking with it fall away, drained of all force. To give them back their force, I must make the effort of reopening time and of placing myself back at the moment when the decision had not yet been made. Even while I am deliberating, it is already through some effort that I succeed in suspending time and in holding open a situation that I sense is closed by a decision already made and which I am resisting. This is why, after having abandoned a project, I so often experience a feeling of relief: "I wasn't so committed after all," the debate was a mere formality, the deliberation was a parody, I had already decided against the project. Weakness of the will is often cited as an argument against freedom. And in fact, if I can voluntarily adopt a behavior and play the role of a warrior or a seducer, this does not depend upon my being a warrior or a seducer "naturally" and with ease, that is, my genuinely being these things. But neither should we seek freedom in the volitional act, which is, according to its very sense, an abortive act. We only resort to the volitional act in order to go against our genuine decision, and as if to prove deliberately our own lack of power. Had we truly assumed the behavior of the warrior or the seducer, then we would have been a warrior or a seducer. Even those things described as obstacles to freedom are in fact deployed by freedom. An unclimbable rock face, a large or small, vertical or diagonal rock face – this only has sense for someone who intends to climb it, for a subject whose projects cut these determinations out of the uniform mass of the in-itself and make an oriented world and a sense

of things suddenly appear. Thus, there is ultimately nothing that could limit freedom, except those limits freedom has itself determined as such through its own initiatives, and the subject has only the exterior world that he gives himself. Since the subject himself, by suddenly appearing, makes sense and value appear among things, and since nothing could reach him except through his giving them a sense and a value, then there is no action of the things upon the subject, but merely a signifying (in the active sense), and a centrifugal *Sinngebung*. The choice seems to be 500 between a scientific understanding of causality, which is incompatible with our self-consciousness, and the affirmation of an absolute freedom without any exterior. It is impossible to identify a point beyond which things would cease to be ἐφ' ἡμῖν [dependent upon us].<sup>4</sup> All things are within our power, or none of them are.

[b. Then there is no such thing as action, choice, or “doing.”]

Yet this first reflection on freedom might result in rendering freedom impossible. If freedom is indeed equal in all of our actions and even in our passions, if it is incommensurate with our behavior, or if the slave displays as much freedom by living in fear as he does in breaking his chains, then it cannot be said that there is such a thing as *free action*. Freedom would then be prior to all actions, and in no case can it be said that “here is where freedom appears,” since in order for free action to be detectable it would have to stand out against a background of life that is not free, or that is less free. Freedom is everywhere, so to speak, but also nowhere. The idea of an acquisition is rejected in the name of freedom, but then freedom becomes a primordial acquisition and something like our state of nature. Since we do not have to bring freedom about, it must be the gift granted us of having no gift, or that nature of consciousness that consists in not having a nature, and in no case can it be expressed on the outside or figure in our life. Thus, the idea of action disappears: nothing can pass from us to the world, since we are nothing determinate and since the non-being that constitutes us could not slip itself into the saturated world. There are only intentions immediately followed by an effect, and we are very close to the Kantian idea of an intention that has the value of an act, to which Scheler objected that the disabled person who would like to save a drowning man and the good swimmer who actually saves him do not have the same experience of autonomy. The very idea of

choice disappears, for to choose is to choose *something* in which freedom sees, at least momentarily, a symbol of itself. A free choice only takes place if freedom puts itself into play in its decision and posits the situation that it chooses as a situation of freedom. A freedom that did not have to bring itself about because it is acquired could not commit itself in this way: it knows quite well that the following instant will find it, in every way, just as free and just as little established. The very notion of freedom requires that our decision plunge into the future, that something has been *done* by it, that the following moment benefits from the preceding one and, if not being a necessity, is at least solicited by it. If freedom has to do with *doing*, then what it does must not immediately be undone by a new freedom. Thus, each instant must not be a closed world; one moment must be able to commit the following ones; once the decision has been made and the action has begun, I must have some acquisition available to me, I must benefit from my momentum, and I must be inclined to continue; there must be an inclination of the mind.

501

It was Descartes who said that preservation requires a power just as great as creation, and this assumes a realist notion of the instant. Of course, the “instant” is not a philosopher’s fiction. It is the point at which one project is completed and another one begins;<sup>5</sup> it is the point where my gaze shifts from one goal to another; it is the *Augen-Blick* [blink of an eye].<sup>6</sup> But this break in time can only appear if the two pieces each make up a block. It is said that consciousness is not broken up into a myriad of instants, but is at least haunted by the specter of the instant, which it must continuously exorcise through a free act. As we will see below, we in fact always have the power of breaking off, but this assumes in every case a power of *beginning*, for there would be no tearing apart if freedom was nowhere committed and was not preparing to establish itself elsewhere. If there were no cycles of behavior, no open situations that call for a certain completion and that can act as a foundation, either for a decision that confirms them or for one that transforms them, then freedom would never take place. Choice of an intellectual character is not only excluded because there is no time before time, but also because choice assumes a previous commitment and because the idea of a first choice is contradictory. If freedom is to have a *field to work with*,<sup>7</sup> if it must be able to assert itself as freedom, then something must separate freedom from its ends, freedom must have a *field*; that is, it must have some privileged possibilities or realities that tend to be preserved in being. As J.-P. Sartre

himself shows, the dream excludes freedom because in the imaginary we have no sooner intended a signification than we already believe we hold its intuitive realization and, in short, because there are no obstacles and there is nothing to do.<sup>8</sup> It has been established that freedom is not to be confused with the abstract decisions of the will at grips with motives or passions; the classical schema of deliberation only applies to a freedom of bad faith that secretly feeds antagonistic motives without wanting to take them up, and itself manufactures the supposed proofs of its own lack of power.

Beneath these noisy debates and these vain attempts to “construct” ourselves, we can see the tacit decisions by which we have articulated the field of possibilities around ourselves, and the fact is that nothing is done so long as we maintain these fixations, and everything is easy once we have weighed these anchors. This is why our freedom must not be sought in the insincere discussions where a style of life that we do not wish to question clashes with circumstances that suggest an alternative: the genuine choice is the choice of our whole character and of our way of being in the world. But either this total choice is never articulated, it is the silent springing forth of our being in the world, in which case it would not be clear in what sense it could be called ours – this freedom glides over itself and is equivalent to a destiny – or the choice that we make of ourselves is truly a choice, a conversion of our existence, but in this case it assumes a preexisting acquisition that it sets out to modify and it establishes a new tradition. This latter will lead us to wonder if the perpetual tearing away by which we defined freedom at the outset is not merely the negative side of our universal engagement in a world, if our indifference toward each determinate thing does not merely express our immersion in all of them, if the ready-made freedom from which we began does not reduce to a power of initiative that could not be transformed into a *doing* without taking up something proposed to us by the world, and finally if concrete and actual freedom do not exist in this exchange. Certainly nothing has sense or value except for me and through me, but this proposition remains indeterminate and is again mistaken for the Kantian idea of a consciousness that only “finds in things what it has put there” and for the idealist refutation of realism, so long as we fail to clarify how we understand the words “sense” and “me.” By defining ourselves as the universal power of *Sinn-Gebung* [giving sense], we have returned to the method of the “that-without-which” and to the classical style of reflective analysis, which

seeks conditions of possibility without worrying about conditions of reality. Thus, we must again take up the analysis of the *Sinngebung* [sense-giving] and show how it can be at once centrifugal and centripetal, since it has been established that there is no freedom without a field.

[c. *Who gives the motives a sense?*]

I declare that this rock face is unclimbable, and it is certain that this attribute – just like the attributes of large and small, straight and diagonal, and in fact like all attributes in general – can only come to the rock face from a plan to climb it and from a human presence. Thus, freedom makes the obstacles to freedom appear, such that we cannot place these obstacles  
 503 opposite freedom as limits. It is clear, however, that given the same project, this rock face over here will appear as an obstacle, while this other more passable one will appear as an aid to the project. My freedom thus does not make an obstacle exist over here and a passageway over there, it merely makes obstacles and passageways exist in general; my freedom does not sketch out the particular figure of this world, it only establishes its general structures. The objection will be that this amounts to the same thing: if my freedom conditions the structure of the “there is,” the “here,” and the “over there,” then my freedom is present everywhere these structures arise; we cannot distinguish the quality “obstacle” from the obstacle itself, relate the first to freedom and the second to the world in itself, which, lacking this quality, would merely be an unnameable and formless mass. Thus, I cannot find a limit to my freedom outside of myself. But could I not find this limit within myself? We must in effect distinguish between my explicit intentions, such as the plan I form today to climb those mountains, and the general intentions that invest my surroundings with some value in a virtual way.<sup>9</sup> Whether or not I have decided to undertake the climb, these mountains appear large because they outstrip my body’s grasp and, even if I have just read *Micromégas*,<sup>10</sup> nothing I do can make them appear small. Beneath myself as a thinking subject (able to place myself at will either on Sirius or on the earth’s surface), there is thus something like a natural self who does not leave behind its terrestrial situation and who continuously sketches out absolute valuations. Moreover, my projects as a thinking being are clearly constructed upon these valuations; if I decide to see things from the point of view of Sirius, I still have recourse to my terrestrial experience in order to do so: I declare, for example, that the Alps are molehills.

[d. *Implicit valuation of the sensible world.*]\*

Insofar as I have hands, feet, a body, and a world, I sustain intentions around myself that are not decided upon and that affect my surroundings in ways I do not choose. These intentions are general in a double sense, first in the sense that they constitute a system in which all possible objects are enclosed: if the mountain seems large and vertical, then the tree appears small and diagonal; and second in the sense that these intentions do not belong to me, they come from farther away than myself and I am not surprised to find them in all psycho-physical subjects who have a similar organization to my own. This is why, as Gestalt theory has shown, there are forms that are privileged for me and for all other humans, and which can give rise to a psychological science and to strict laws. Consider this collection of dots:

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504

It is always perceived as “six groups of dots, two millimeters apart”; and some figures are always perceived as a cube, while others are always seen as a flat mosaic.<sup>11</sup> Everything happens as if, prior to our judgment and our freedom, someone were allocating such and such a sense to such and such a given constellation. Of course, perceptual structures do not always force themselves upon us: some are ambiguous. But these latter reveal to us even more clearly the presence of a spontaneous valuation in us: for these are the floating figures that propose in turn different significations. Now, a pure consciousness can do anything except be unaware of its own intentions, and an absolute freedom cannot choose itself as hesitant, since this amounts to allowing itself to be drawn in several directions, and since by definition the possibilities owe their entire force to freedom, the weight that freedom allocates to one of them is simultaneously withdrawn from the others. We can certainly decompose a form by looking at it askew, but only because freedom makes use of the gaze and its spontaneous valuations. Without these spontaneous valuations, we would not have a world, that is, a collection of things that emerges from the formless mass by offering themselves to our body as things “to be touched,” “to be taken,” or “to be climbed”; we would never be aware of adjusting ourselves to the things and of reaching them out there where they are, beyond us; we would merely be aware of rigorously



conceiving of objects that are immanent to our intentions; we would not be in the world, ourselves implicated in the spectacle and, so to speak, intermingled with things; we would have merely a representation of a universe. Thus, it is certainly true that there are no obstacles in themselves, but the “myself” that qualifies them as obstacles is not an acosmic subject; this subject anticipates himself among the things in order to give them the shape of things. There is an autochthonous sense of the world that is constituted in the exchange between the world and our embodied existence and that forms the ground of every deliberate *Sinngebung* [sense-giving act].

[e. *Sedimentation of being in the world.*]

This is not only true of an impersonal and ultimately abstract function like “external perception.” There is something analogous in all valuations. It has been quite aptly noted that pain or fatigue can never be considered as causes that “act” upon my freedom, and that, if I experience [éprouve] 505 pain or fatigue at a given moment, then they do not come from the outside; they always have a sense, they express my attitude toward the world. Pain makes me give in and say what I should have kept quiet; fatigue brings my journey to an end. We all know that moment when we decide to give up tolerating the pain or the fatigue and when, instantaneously, they become actually intolerable. Fatigue does not stop my companion because he likes the feel of his body damp with sweat, the scorching heat of the road and the sun and, in short, because he likes to feel himself at the center of things, to draw together their rays, or to turn himself into the gaze for this light and the sense of touch for these surfaces. My fatigue stops me because I do not enjoy this, because I have differently chosen my way of being in the world, and because, for example, I do not look to be out in nature, but rather to gain the recognition of others. I am free in relation to my fatigue precisely to the extent that I am free in relation to my being in the world; [despite my fatigue] I am free to continue along my way on condition of transforming my being in the world.<sup>12</sup>

But in fact, here again, we must recognize a sort of sedimentation of our life: when an attitude toward the world has been confirmed often enough, it becomes privileged for us. If freedom does not tolerate being confronted by any motive, then my habitual being in the world is equally fragile at each moment, and the complexes I have for years nourished

through complacency remain equally innocuous, for freedom's gesture can effortlessly shatter them at any moment. And yet, after having built my life upon an inferiority complex, continuously reinforced for twenty years, it is not likely that I would change. A cursory rationalism would obviously object to this illegitimate notion by saying: there are no degrees of possibility, either the free act no longer exists or it is still there, in which case freedom is complete. In short, they would argue that this "likely" is meaningless. This notion belongs to statistical thinking, which is not thinking at all, since it has nothing to do with any particular thing actually existing, nor with any moment of time, nor with any concrete event. "It's unlikely that Paul will renounce writing bad books": this is meaningless since, at any moment, Paul might decide to stop writing such books. The "likely" is everywhere and nowhere, it is a reified fiction that has merely a psychological existence; the "likely" is not an ingredient of the world.

– And yet, we have already encountered it just a moment ago in the perceived world: the mountain is large or small insofar as it is situated as a perceived thing in the field of my virtual actions and in relation to a level that is not merely the level of my individual life, but rather the level of "every man." Generality and probability are not fictions, they are phenomena, and so we must find a phenomenological foundation for statistical thought. Statistical thought necessarily belongs to a being who is fixed, situated, and surrounded in the world. "It's unlikely" that I would in this moment destroy an inferiority complex in which I have been complacent now for twenty years. This means that I am committed to inferiority, that I have decided to dwell within it, that this past, if not a destiny, has at least a specific weight, and that it is not a sum of events over there, far away from me, but rather the atmosphere of my present. The rationalist alternative – either the free act is possible or not, either the event originates in me or is imposed from the outside – does not fit with our relations with the world and with our past. Our freedom does not destroy our situation, but gears into it: so long as we are alive, our situation is open, which implies both that it calls forth privileged modes of resolution and that it, by itself, lacks the power to procure any of them.

506

[f. Valuation of historical situations: class prior to class consciousness.]

We would arrive at the same result by examining our relations with history. If I consider myself in my absolute concretion and such as reflec-

tion presents me to myself, then I am an anonymous and pre-human flow that has not yet been articulated as “worker,” for example, or as “bourgeois.” If I later conceive of myself as a man among men, or as a bourgeois among bourgeois, it seems that this can only be a secondary view of myself; I am never a worker or a bourgeois at my very core, but rather a consciousness that freely values itself as a bourgeois or a proletarian consciousness. Indeed, my objective place in the circuit of production is not sufficient to give rise to an awareness of class. People were exploited long before there were revolutionaries. The worker’s movement does not always progress in times of economic crisis. The revolt is not, then, the product of objective conditions, but conversely it is the decision made by the worker to desire the revolution that turns him into a proletarian. The valuation of the present is established by the free project of the future. One might conclude from this that history has no sense by itself, it has the sense we give it through our will.

– And yet here again we fall back into the method of the “that-without-which”; in opposition to objective thought, which places the subject into the network of determinism, we have answered with an idealist reflection that makes determinism rest upon the subject’s constituting activity. Now, we have already seen that objective thought and reflective analysis are but two appearances of the same error, two ways of ignoring phenomena. Objective thought deduces class consciousness from the objective condition of the proletariat. Idealist reflection reduces the proletarian condition to the proletarian’s consciousness of that condition. The former draws the consciousness of class from class as defined by objective characteristics, whereas the latter reduces “being a worker” to the consciousness of being a worker. In both cases, we are operating on the level of abstraction, because we remain within the alternative between the in-itself and the for-itself. If we take up the question again, not with the intention of discovering the causes of this becoming conscious – for there is no cause that can act upon a consciousness from the outside, nor its conditions of possibility, for what we need is the conditions that make it actual – but rather with the intention of discovering class consciousness itself, if, in short, we adopt a truly existential method, then what do we find? I am not conscious of being a worker or a bourgeois because I in fact sell my work or because I in fact show solidarity to the capitalist machine, and I certainly do not become a worker or a bourgeois the day that I commit to seeing history through the lens of class

warfare. Rather, “I exist as a worker” or “I exist as a bourgeois” first, and this mode of communication with the world and society motivates both my revolutionary or conservative projects and my explicit judgments (“I am a worker,” or “I am a bourgeois”), without it being the case that I can deduce the former from the latter, nor the latter from the former. Neither the economy nor society, taken as a system of impersonal forces, determine me as a proletarian, but rather society or the economy such as I bear them within myself and such as I live them; nor is it, for that matter, an intellectual operation without any motive, but rather my way of being in the world within this institutional framework.

[As a worker,] I have a certain style of life: I am at the mercy of unemployment and prosperity; I cannot do with my life whatever I please; I am paid on a weekly basis; I control neither the conditions, nor the products of my labor. And as a result, I feel like a foreigner in my factory, my nation, and my life. I am accustomed to dealing with a *fatum* [destiny] that I do not respect, but that must be humored. Or perhaps I work as a day-laborer: I have no farm of my own, nor even any work tools; I move from farm to farm, renting myself out during harvest season; I sense a nameless power hovering over me that turns me into a nomad, even when I would like to settle down. Or finally, perhaps I am the tenant of a farm where the owner has not installed electricity, even though the main lines are a mere two hundred yards away. I am allotted only one inhabitable room for myself and my family, even though it would be easy to make other rooms in the house available. My fellow factory or harvest workers, or the other tenant farmers, do the same work I do, and under similar conditions; we coexist in the same situation and we feel ourselves to be similar, not through some comparison, as if each one of us lived above all in isolation, but on the basis of our tasks and gestures. These situations do not assume any explicit valuation, and if there is a tacit valuation, it is the thrust of a freedom without any project encountering unknown obstacles; in no way can we speak of a choice, for in the three cases it is sufficient that I am born and that I exist in order to experience my life as difficult and constrained – I do not choose to experience it this way. But things might well stay right there without my reaching class consciousness, understanding myself as a proletarian, or becoming a revolutionary. How, then, will this passage come about?

The worker learns that other workers in another trade have, after a strike, obtained an increased salary; he observes that shortly thereafter

the salaries in his own factory were raised. The *fatum* with which he was grappling begins to become more clearly articulated. The day-laborer, who has rarely interacted with workers, who does not resemble them, and who is hardly fond of them, sees the price of manufactured objects increasing, as well as the cost of living, and notices that one can no longer make ends meet. It might happen that, in that moment, he blames the workers of the city, and so class consciousness will not be born. If it is born, this is not because the day-laborer has decided to become a revolutionary and, consequently, to confer a value upon his actual condition, but rather because he perceived concretely the synchronicity between his life and the lives of the workers, and the community of their lot in life. The small farmer, who does not mix with day-laborers, and even less so with the village workers, separated from them through a world of customs and value judgments, nevertheless feels himself on the same side as the day-laborers when he pays them an insufficient salary; he feels solidarity with the workers of the city when he learns that the owners of the farm preside over the board of directors of several industrial corporations. Social space begins to become polarized, and a region of “the exploited” appears. Upon every upsurge, coming from any point on the social horizon whatsoever, the regrouping takes shape beyond different ideologies and trades. Class is coming into being, and we call a situation “revolutionary” when the objectively existing connection between the segments of the proletariat (that is, those connections that an absolute observer would ultimately recognize between them) is finally experienced [vécu] in the perception of a common obstacle to each one’s existence. There is never a need for a representation of the revolution to arise. It is unlikely, for example, that the Russian peasants of 1917 explicitly set for themselves the task of the revolution and the transformation of property relations. Revolution is born day to day, from the interlocking of immediate ends with ends that are further removed. There is no need for each proletarian to conceive of himself as proletarian in the sense a Marxist theoretician gives this word. It is enough for the day-laborer or the farmer to feel himself moving toward a certain crossroads to which the village worker’s path also leads. Both open onto the revolution that – had it been described and represented to them in advance – would have frightened them. At most we can say the revolution is at the end of the paths they have taken and is in their projects in the form of a “things-must-change,” which each concretely experiences in his own difficulties

and at the basis of his particular unquestioned beliefs. Neither the *fatum*, nor the free act that destroys it, are represented; they are lived in ambiguity. This does not mean that the workers and the peasants bring about the revolution unwittingly and in them we have but “elementary forces” or blind actors skillfully manipulated by some lucid agitators. The chief of police may indeed see history this way. But such views are of no help to him when confronted with a truly revolutionary situation, when the commands issued by the so-called agitators are immediately understood as if through some preestablished harmony and find complicity everywhere, because they crystallize what is latent in the life of all producers.

[g. *Intellectual project and existential project.*]\*

The revolutionary movement, like the work of the artist, is an intention that creates its own instruments and its own means of expression. The revolutionary project is not the result of a deliberate judgment, nor the explicit positing of an end. This is what it is for the propagandist, because he has been trained by the intellectual, or for the intellectual, because he regulates his life on the basis of his thought. But the revolution only ceases to be the abstract decision of a thinker and becomes an historical reality if worked out in inter-human relations and in the relations of man with his work. Thus, it is true that I recognize myself as a worker or bourgeois the day I situate myself in relation to a possible revolution, and that this stand does not result, through some mechanistic causality, from my social status as a worker or bourgeois (and this is why all classes have their traitors); but no more is this a spontaneous, instantaneous, and unmotivated valuation – it was prepared for by a molecular process, it ripens in coexistence prior to bursting forth in words and relating to objective ends.

510

We are correct to observe that the most lucid revolutionaries are not produced by the most extreme poverty, but we forget to ask why a return to prosperity often brings about a radicalization of the masses. This is because the relaxation of the demands of life makes possible a new arrangement of social space: horizons are no longer restricted to the most immediate of worries, there is some breathing space, and there is room for a new life project. This fact does not prove that the worker turns himself into a worker and a revolutionary *ex nihilo*, but rather that he does so upon a certain ground of coexistence. The error of the conception

under consideration is, in short, to examine only intellectual projects, rather than bringing into the account the existential project, which is the polarization of a life toward a determinate–indeterminate goal of which it has no representation and that it only recognizes at the moment the goal is reached. They reduce intentionality in general to the particular case of objectifying acts, they turn the proletarian condition into an object of thought, and they have no trouble showing, in accordance with the established method of idealism, that, like every object of thought, it only subsists before and by the consciousness that constitutes it as an object. Idealism (like objective thought) misses genuine intentionality, which, rather than positing its object, is toward its object.<sup>13</sup> Idealism is unaware of the interrogative, the subjunctive, the wish, the expectation, and the positive indetermination of these modes of consciousness. It is only familiar with indicative consciousness in the present or the future tenses, and this is why it does not succeed in accounting for class. For class is neither simply recorded, nor established by decree; just like the *fatum* of the capitalist machine and just like the revolution, class is – prior to being conceived – lived as an obsessive presence, as a possibility, as an enigma, and as a myth.

To make class consciousness into the result of a decision or a choice is to say that the questions are resolved the day they are posed, that every question already contains the response it awaits; it is, in short, to return to immanence and to give up the hope of understanding history. In fact, the intellectual project and the positing of ends are merely the fulfillment of an existential project. I am the one who gives a sense and a future to my life, but this does not mean that I conceive of this sense and this future; rather, they spring forth from my present and from my past, and particularly from my present and past mode of coexistence. Even for the intellectual who becomes a revolutionary, the decision is not born  
 511 *ex nihilo*; sometimes it follows up a long solitude: the intellectual seeks a doctrine that is demanding of him, and that cures him of subjectivity; sometimes he bows to the clarity a Marxist interpretation of history can bring, in which case he has placed knowledge at the center of his life, and this itself is only understood in relation to his past and his childhood. Even an unmotivated decision to become a revolutionary, made by a pure act of freedom, would again express a certain manner of being in the natural and social world, which is typically that of the intellectual. He only “joins the working class” through his situation as an intellectual

(and this is why even fideism,<sup>14</sup> in his case, remains justifiably suspect). For the worker, the decision is elaborated *a fortiori* in his life. In this case, it is no longer thanks to some misunderstanding that the horizon of an individual life and the revolutionary aims coincide: for the worker, the revolution is a much more immediate and imminent possibility than for the intellectual, since he is at grips with the economic machine in his own life. And this is why, statistically, there are more workers than bourgeoisie in a revolutionary party. Of course, motivation does not suppress freedom. Even the most strict workers' parties have included many intellectuals among their leaders, and it is likely that a man like Lenin identified himself with the revolution and ended up transcending the distinction between intellectual and worker. But these are precisely the virtues of action and commitment. At the outset, I am not an individual above class; I am situated socially, and my freedom, even if it has the power to commit me elsewhere, does not have the power to turn me immediately into what I decide to be. Thus, being bourgeois or a worker is not merely being conscious of so being, it is to give myself the value of a worker or a bourgeois through an implicit or existential project that merges with our way of articulating the world and of coexisting with others. My decision takes up a spontaneous sense of my life that it can confirm or deny, but that it cannot annul. Idealism and objective thought equally miss the arrival of class consciousness, the first because it deduces actual existence from consciousness, the other because it derives consciousness from actual existence, and both of them because they are unaware of the relation of motivation.

[h. *The For-Itself and the For-Others, intersubjectivity.*]

One might respond from the idealist side that I am not for myself a particular project, but rather a pure consciousness, and that the attributes "bourgeois" or "worker" only belong to me insofar as I place myself back among others, insofar as I see myself through their eyes, from the outside, and as an "other." Here we would have categories drawn from the For-Others, and not from the For-Self. But if there were two types of categories, then how could I have the experience of another person, that is, of an *alter ego*? This assumes that the quality of a possible "other" is already nascent in the view I have of myself, and that his quality of *ego* is already implicated in the view I take of others. Again, the response will be



that the other is given as a fact and not as a possibility of my own being. What is meant by this? Do they mean that I would not have the experience of other men if there were none on the surface of the earth? The proposition is self-evident, but it does not resolve our question, since, as Kant already said, one cannot pass from “all knowledge begins with experience” to “all knowledge comes from experience.” If other empirically existing men are to be other men for me, I must have what is needed in order to recognize them, and so the structures of the For-Others must already be the dimensions of the For-Self. Moreover, it is impossible to derive all of the specifications that we are speaking of from the For-Others. The other is neither necessarily, nor even ever fully, an object for me. And, such as occurs in cases of sympathy, I can perceive another person as bare existence and as freedom as much or as little as I can myself. The-Other-as-an-object is only an insincere modality of the other, just as absolute subjectivity is only an abstract notion of myself. Thus, even in my most radical reflection, I must already grasp around my absolute individuality something like a halo of generality, or an atmosphere of “sociality.” This is necessary if the words “a bourgeois” and “a man” are later to be able to take on a sense for me. I must immediately grasp myself as eccentric to myself, and my singular existence must diffuse, so to speak, around itself an existence as quality. The For-Selves – me for myself and the other for himself – must stand out against a background of For-Others – me for others and others for me. My life must have a sense that I do not constitute, there must be, literally, an intersubjectivity; each of us must be at once anonymous in the sense of an absolute individuality and anonymous in the sense of an absolute generality. Our being in the world is the concrete bearer of this double anonymity.

[i. *There is some sense to history.*]<sup>15</sup>

On this condition, there can be situations, a sense of history, and an historical truth – three ways of saying the same thing. If I actually made myself into a worker or bourgeois through an absolute initiative, and if, in general, nothing ever solicited freedom, then history would have no structure, we would not see any events take shape there, and anything might result from anything. There would be no British Empire, taken as a relatively stable historical form to which a name can be given and in which certain likely properties can be recognized. The history of the

social movement would not contain revolutionary situations or periods of latency. A revolution would be equally possible at any moment, and one could reasonably expect a despot to be converted to anarchism. History would never be going anywhere, and, even if a short period of time were examined, it could never be said that events are conspiring toward a certain outcome. The Statesman would forever be an adventurer, that is, he would commandeer events to his own advantage by giving them a sense that they *did not have*. Now, if it really is true that history is powerless to complete anything without the consciousnesses that take it up and that thereby decide its course, and if, as a result, history can never be detached from us, like a foreign power that would make use of us toward its own ends, then *precisely because history is always lived history* we cannot deny it at least a fragmentary sense. Something is emerging that will perhaps be aborted, but that for now would satisfy the indications of the present. Nothing can make it happen that a military power “above classes” in the France of 1799 should not appear in the trajectory of the revolutionary backlash, and that the role of “military dictator” should not here be a “role to be played.” Bonaparte’s project – known to us through its actualization – leads us to judge in this manner. But prior to Bonaparte, Dumouriez, Custine, and others had developed it, and we must account for this convergence. What we call the sense of events is not an idea that produces them, nor the fortuitous outcome of their assemblage. It is the concrete project of a future that is elaborated in social coexistence and in the One [l’On] prior to every personal decision. At the point in its history to which the class dynamic had arrived in 1799, the revolution being able neither to be continued nor canceled, and all guarantees having been made for the freedom of individuals, each one of them – through this functional and generalized existence that turned each into an historical subject – tended merely to rest upon what had been acquired. To offer them the alternative of either taking up again the revolutionary methods of government, or returning to the social state of 1789, would have been an historical error, not that there is some truth to history independent of our projects and evaluations, which remain forever free, but because there is an average and statistical signification of these projects.

This amounts to saying that we give history its sense, but not without history offering us that sense. The *Sinn-gebung* is not merely centrifugal, and this is why the individual is not the subject of history. There is an exchange between generalized existence and individual existence; both

receive and both give. A moment occurs when the sense that was taking shape in the One and that was merely an indeterminate possibility threatened by the contingency of history is taken up by an individual. Thus it can happen that, having taken hold of history, an individual directs it (at least for a time) well beyond what seemed to be its sense and commits history to a new dialectic, such as when Bonaparte the Consul turned himself into Emperor and conqueror. We are not claiming that history has a single sense from beginning to end, any more than an individual life does. In any case, we mean that freedom only modifies history by taking up what history *offered* at the moment in question, and it does so by a sort of shift or slippage.<sup>16</sup> In relation to this proposal made by the present, we can distinguish the adventurer from the Statesman, the historical deception from the truth of an epoch and, consequently, our assessment of the past – even if it never reaches absolute objectivity – is never entitled to be arbitrary.

[j. *The Ego and its halo of generality.*]

We thus recognize, surrounding our initiatives and ourselves taken as this strictly individual project, a zone of generalized existence and of already completed projects, significations scattered between us and the things, which confer upon us the qualities of “man,” “bourgeois,” or “worker.” Generality already intervenes, our presence to ourselves is already mediated by it. We cease to be pure consciousness the moment that the natural or social constellation ceases to be an unformulated “this” and is crystallized into a situation, from the moment it takes on a sense, in short, from the moment we exist. Each thing appears to us through a medium that it colors with its fundamental quality. This piece of wood is neither an assemblage of colors and tactile givens, nor even their total *Gestalt*; rather, something like a woody essence emanates from it, these “sensible givens” modulate a certain theme or illustrate a certain style that wood is, and that establishes an horizon of sense around this piece of wood and around the perception I have of it. The natural world, as we have seen, is nothing other than the place of all possible themes and styles. It is irreducibly an unmatched individual and a sense. Correlatively, the generality or the individuality of the subject, subjectivity as bearing qualities or pure subjectivity, the anonymity of the One or the anonymity of consciousness – these are not in each case two conceptions

of the subject between which philosophy would have to choose, but two moments of a single structure that is the concrete subject.

515

Let us consider, for example, sensing. I lose myself in this red that is in front of me without qualifying it in any way; it certainly seems that this experience puts me into contact with a pre-human subject. Who perceives this red? Certainly not anyone we could name, nor anyone who could be placed among other perceiving subjects. For no direct comparison will ever be possible between this experience of red that I have, and the experience of red described to me by others. Here I am within my own point of view, and, just as every experience – insofar as it has to do with impressions – is in the same way strictly my own, it seems that a unique and never doubled subject embraces them all. I formulate a thought, for example, I am thinking of Spinoza's God; this thought, such as I live it, is a certain landscape to which no other person will ever gain access, even if I otherwise succeed in starting up a conversation with a friend on the question of Spinoza's God. And yet, the individuality of even these experiences is not pure. For the thickness of this red, its *haecceity*, the power that it has of filling me and of reaching me, comes from the fact that it solicits and obtains a certain vibration from my gaze, and presupposes that I am familiar with a world of colors of which it is a particular variation. Thus, the concrete red stands out against a background of generality, and this is why, even without passing over to the other's point of view, I grasp myself in perception as a perceiving subject and not as an unmatched consciousness. Surrounding my perception of this red, I sense all of the regions of my being that it does not touch, as well as that region destined to colors – "vision" – by which it does touch me. Likewise, my thought of Spinoza's God is only apparently a rigorously unique experience, for it is a crystallization of a certain cultural world – Spinozist philosophy – or of a certain philosophical style, in which I immediately recognize a "Spinozist" idea.

[k. *The absolute flow is for itself a consciousness.*]\*

Thus, we need not wonder why the thinking subject or consciousness catches sight of itself as a man, an embodied subject, or an historical subject, and we should not treat this apperception as a second-order operation that the subject would perform beginning from his absolute existence. The absolute flow appears perspectively to its own gaze as

516 “a consciousness” (or as a man or an embodied subject) because it is a field of presence – presence to itself, to others, and to the world – and because this presence throws it into the natural and cultural world from which it can be understood. We must not represent this flow to ourselves as an absolute contact with itself or as an absolute density without any internal fault-lines, but rather as a being who continues itself into the outside. If the subject makes a continuous and forever peculiar choice of himself and of his ways of being, one might wonder why his experience intertwines with itself and presents to him objects or definite historical phases; why we have a general notion of time that is valid across all times; and finally, why the experience of each one fits with that of others. The question itself, however, must be put into question, for we are not given a fragment of time followed by another or an individual flow followed by another, but rather each subjectivity taking itself up, and subjectivities taking each other up in the generality of a nature, or the cohesion of an intersubjective life of a world. The present actualizes the mediation between the For-Itself and the For-Others, between individuality and generality. True reflection presents me to myself, not as an idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical to my presence in the world and to others, such as I currently bring it into being: I am everything that I see and I am an intersubjective field, not in spite of my body and my historical situation, but rather by being this body and this situation and by being, through them, everything else.

[I. *I do not choose myself starting from nothing.*]

From this perspective, what becomes of the freedom we discussed at the outset? I can no longer pretend to be a nothingness and to choose myself continuously from nothing. If nothingness appears in the world through subjectivity, then it can also be said that nothingness comes into being through the world. I am a general refusal of being anything whatever, secretly accompanied by a continuous acceptance of some form of qualified being. *For even this general refusal still counts among the ways of being and figures in the world.* I can, of course, interrupt my projects at any moment. But what exactly is this power? It is the power of beginning something else, for we never remain in suspense in the nothingness. We are always in the plenum and in being, just as a face, even when at rest or even when dead, is always condemned to express something (there are

cadavers that appear surprised, peaceful, or unobtrusive), and just as silence is still a modality of the sonorous world. I can break every mold and scoff at everything, but there is no case in which I am entirely committed: it is not that I withdraw into my freedom, but because I commit myself elsewhere. Rather than thinking of my sorrow, I stare at my fingernails, or I have lunch, or I get involved in politics. Far from my freedom being forever alone, it is in fact never without accomplices, and its power of perpetually tearing itself away leans upon my universal engagement in the world.

My actual freedom is not on this side of my being, but out in front of me, among the things. It must not be said that I continually choose myself on the pretext that I *could* continually refuse what I am. But not refusing is not a choice. We could only identify non-doing and doing by stripping the implicit of all phenomenal value and by spreading the world out in front of us at each moment in a perfect transparency, that is, by destroying the “worldliness” of the world. Consciousness holds itself responsible for everything, it takes on everything, but it has nothing of its own and makes its life in the world. One is led to conceive of freedom as a continually renewed choice so long as the notion of a natural or generalized time has not been introduced. We have seen that there is no such thing as natural time if we understand this to mean a time of objects without subjectivity. There is, however, at least a generalized time, and this is even the time intended by the common notion. This time is the perpetual starting over of the series: past, present, future. It is like a disappointment and a repeated failure. This is what we express in saying that time is continuous: the present that it brings to us is never really present, since it is always past when it appears, and the future has there but the appearance of a goal toward which we are moving, since it soon arrives in the present and since we then turn toward another future. This is the time of our bodily functions, which are cyclical like them, and it is the time of nature with which we coexist. It only offers us the outline and the abstract form of a commitment, since it continuously gnaws away at itself and undoes what it has just done. As long as we oppose the For-Itself and the In-Itself without any mediation, as long as we do not perceive that natural outline of a subjectivity between ourselves and the world, and that pre-personal time that rests upon itself, then acts will be necessary to sustain the springing forth of time and everything will be a choice in the same way: the breathing reflex as well as the moral decision,

or conservation as well as creation. For us, consciousness only attributes this power to itself if it passes over in silence the event that establishes its infrastructure and that is its birth. A consciousness for which the world is “self-evident,” that finds the world “already constituted” and present even within consciousness itself, *absolutely* chooses neither its being nor its manner of being.

[m. *Conditioned freedom.*]

518 What then is freedom? To be born is to be simultaneously born of the world and to be born into the world.<sup>17</sup> The world is always already constituted, but also never completely constituted. In the first relation we are solicited, in the second we are open to an infinity of possibilities. Yet this analysis remains abstract, for we exist in both ways *simultaneously*. Thus, there is never determinism and never an absolute choice; I am never a mere thing and never a bare consciousness. In particular, even our initiatives, and even the situations that we have chosen, once they have been taken up, carry us along as if by a state of grace. The generality of the “role” and of the situation comes to the aid of the decision, and, in this exchange between the situation and the one who takes it up, it is impossible to determine the “contribution of the situation” and the “contribution of freedom.” We torture a man to make him speak. If he refuses to give the names and addresses that we wish to extract from him, this is not through a solitary and ungrounded decision; he still felt himself among his comrades and was still committed to their common struggle; he was somehow incapable of speaking; or perhaps he had, for months or even years, confronted this test in his thoughts and staked his entire life upon it; or finally, he might wish to prove what he had always thought and said about freedom by overcoming this test. These motives do not annul freedom, but they at least show that freedom is not without supports within being. It is not ultimately a bare consciousness that resists the pain, but the prisoner along with his comrades or along with those he loves and under whose gaze he lives, or finally consciousness along with its arrogantly desired solitude, which is again to say a certain mode of *Mit-Sein* [being-with].<sup>18</sup> It is, of course, the individual alone in his prison who reanimates these phantoms each day, and they give him back the strength that he had given them; but reciprocally, if he is committed to this action, if he ties himself to his comrades or clings to this morality, this is because

the historical situation, his comrades, and the world around him seemed to him to expect this particular behavior from him.

We could thus continue this analysis endlessly. We choose our world and the world chooses us. In any case, it is certain that we can never reserve in ourselves an enclave into which being does not penetrate without it immediately being the case that this freedom takes the shape of being and becomes a motive and a support from the mere fact that it is lived. Taken concretely, freedom is always an encounter between the exterior and the interior – even that pre-human and pre-historical freedom by which we began – and it weakens, without ever becoming zero, to the extent that the *tolerance* of the bodily and institutional givens of our life diminishes. As Husserl said, there is a “field of freedom” and a “conditioned freedom,”<sup>19</sup> not because freedom is absolute within the limits of this field and nothing outside of it (for just like the perceptual field, this one too has no linear limits), but because I have immediate possibilities and more distant possibilities. Our commitments sustain our power, and there is no freedom without some power. Our freedom, it is said, is either total or non-existent. This is the dilemma of objective thought and its accomplice, reflective analysis. Indeed, if we place ourselves within being, then our actions must come from the outside; if we return to constituting consciousness, then our actions must come from within. But we have learned precisely to recognize the order of phenomena. We are mixed up with the world and with others in an inextricable confusion. The idea of a situation precludes there being an absolute freedom at the origin of our commitments and, for that matter, at their end. No commitment, and not even a commitment to the Hegelian State, can cause me to transcend all differences and render me free for anything. This universality itself, from the mere fact that it would be lived, would stand out as a particularity against the background of the world; existence simultaneously generalizes and particularizes everything that it intends, and can never be complete.

519

[n. *Provisional synthesis of the in-itself and the for-itself in presence.*]

And yet, the synthesis of the In-itself and the For-itself that brings about Hegelian freedom has its truth. In a sense, it is the very definition of existence: it is accomplished at each moment before our eyes in the phenomenon of presence, only it must be immediately started over and



does not suppress our finitude. By taking up a present, I again take hold of my past and I transform it, I alter its sense, I free myself and detach myself from it. But I only do so by committing myself elsewhere. Psychoanalytic treatment does not heal by provoking an insight into the past, but by first relating the subject to his doctor through new existential relations. It is not a question of giving a scientific approval to the psychoanalytic interpretation, nor of discovering a notional sense of the past; rather, it is a question of re-living the past as signifying this or that, and the patient only achieves this by seeing his past from the perspective of his coexistence with the doctor. The complex is not dissolved by a freedom without instruments, but rather is dislocated by a new pulsation of time that has its supports and its motives. The same is true for all moments of insight: they are actual if they are sustained by a new commitment. Now, this engagement in turn is accomplished in the implicit, and is thus only valid for a particular temporal cycle. The choice that we make of our life always takes place upon the basis of a certain given. My freedom can deflect my life from its spontaneous sense, but only through a series of shifts, by first joining with it, and not through any absolute creation. All explanations of my behavior in terms of my past, my temperament, or my milieu are thus true, but only on condition of not considering them as separable contributions, but rather as moments of my total being whose sense I could make explicit in different directions, without our ever being able to say if it is I who give them their sense or if I receive it from them.

[o. *My signification is outside of myself.*]\*

I am a psychological and historical structure. Along with existence, I received a way of existing, or a style. All of my actions and thoughts are related to this structure, and even a philosopher's thought is merely a way of making explicit his hold upon the world, which is all he is. And yet, I am free, not in spite of or beneath these motivations, but rather by their means. For that meaningful life, that particular signification of nature and history that I am, does not restrict my access to the world; it is rather my means of communication with it. It is by being what I am at present, without any restrictions and without holding anything back, that I have a chance at progressing; it is by living my time that I can understand other times; it is by plunging into the present and into the world, by resolutely

taking up what I am by chance, by willing what I will, and by doing what I do, that I can go farther. The only way I can fail to be free is if I attempt to transcend my natural and social situation by refusing to take it up at first, rather than meeting up with the natural and human world through it. Nothing determines me from the outside, not that nothing solicits me, but rather because I am immediately outside of myself and open to the world. We are true right through; we carry with us – from the mere fact that we are in and toward the world [*au monde*] and not merely in the world [*dans le monde*], like things – all that is necessary for transcending ourselves. We need not worry that our choices or our actions restrain our freedom, since choice and action alone can free us from our anchors. Just as reflection borrows its desire for absolute adequation from the perception that makes something appear, and that idealism thereby tacitly makes use of the “originary opinion” that it had wanted to destroy as mere opinion, so too does freedom become mired in the contradictions of commitment and does not notice that it would not be freedom without the roots that it thrusts into the world. Will I make that promise? Will I risk my life for so little? Will I give up my freedom in order to save freedom? There are no theoretical responses to these questions. There are, however, these things that appear, irrecusably, that loved person in front of you, these men existing as slaves around you, and *your* freedom cannot will itself without emerging from its singularity and without willing freedom in *general*. Whether it is a question of things or of historical situations, philosophy has no other function than to teach us to see them anew, and it is true to say that philosophy actualizes itself by destroying itself as an isolated philosophy. But it is precisely here that we must remain silent, for only the hero fully lives his relation with men and with the world, and it is hardly fitting for another to speak in his name.

521

Your son is caught in the fire, you will save him . . . You would trade your shoulder, if there were an obstacle, to knock it down. You reside in your very act. You are your act . . . [. . .] You give yourself in exchange . . . Your signification shines forth, dazzlingly. It is your duty, your hatred, your love, your loyalty, your creativity . . . [. . .] Man is a knot of relations, and relations alone count for man.<sup>20</sup>